



Winning Work in the Age of AI:

How GHD Engineering is Transforming Proposal Generation

The Business Development Bottleneck

Across professional services, the volume of client requests for proposals has surged while business development teams remain lean—if not shrinking. In legal, architecture, engineering, and consulting, firms are navigating an increasingly competitive marketplace where the ability to win work hinges on the speed and quality of their proposals. But too often, those proposals are being assembled in ways that haven't meaningfully changed in over a decade.

What used to be an occasional RFP is now a daily demand. Marketing and BD leaders are expected to support dozens—sometimes hundreds—of pursuits each month, often with no additional headcount or systems support. The result is a growing misalignment: fee earners are pulled into low-leverage tasks, proposal specialists are overwhelmed, and firms are forced to choose between speed and quality. That tradeoff is no longer acceptable to clients.

According to a 2024 McKinsey report, over 70% of professional services buyers say the quality of the proposal has a “significant impact” on their selection decision. At the same time, Gartner data shows that the average proposal team spends over 60% of their time on manual content assembly and formatting—time that could be reinvested in strategic messaging, competitive intelligence, or tailoring the submission to the client's needs.

This isn't simply an operational inefficiency. It's a structural bottleneck that costs firms real revenue and undermines their ability to scale. Firms are not losing work because they lack talent—they're losing because they haven't equipped their teams with the systems needed to unlock that talent at scale.

What's Broken: The Old Way of Doing Proposals

At the heart of this issue is a reliance on outdated and fragmented processes.

GHD, a global AEC firm with over 11,000 professionals operating across five continents, was submitting more than 400 proposals each month. Teams were burdened by regionally siloed content, inconsistent templates, and fragmented review processes. Much of the critical information — CVs, project descriptions, and technical contributions — was being manually sourced from legacy systems, shared drives, or individual files.

The result? Proposal quality varied significantly, valuable institutional knowledge was underutilized, and top performers were spending too much time reworking boilerplate content instead of focusing on strategy, storytelling, and client needs.

Despite GHD's deep bench of expertise, there was no scalable system in place to deploy that knowledge efficiently across opportunities. The firm was rich in experience—but lacked the infrastructure to harness it effectively.

The New Era: Unified Experience Platforms + Generative AI

To overcome these limitations, GHD invested in modern experience platforms—centralized systems designed to manage people, projects, and expertise as structured, queryable data. Rather than treating proposal content as a collection of static documents, GHD began treating it as a living knowledge asset.

At GHD, the transformation focused on bid standardization. The firm created a modular content library that allows proposal managers in Canada, the U.S., Australia, and elsewhere to generate regionally compliant responses using a shared foundation of approved content. Each module—ranging from methodology statements to QA processes to bios—can be adapted by AI to reflect the specific client or jurisdiction. As a result, teams now begin each proposal with 60–80% of the content already drafted and contextually aligned.

Crucially, the firm built these systems with adoption in mind. Templates, content libraries, expert-finder tools, and multilingual search features are embedded into workflows—not layered on top of them. That design principle has driven engagement, allowing these platforms to become core infrastructure rather than optional add-ons.

AI's Role in Winning Work

Artificial intelligence plays a pivotal role in these platforms—not as a gimmick, but as a set of targeted, high-impact capabilities.

Generative AI enables the rapid creation of bios, capability statements, project summaries, and executive narratives by synthesizing structured firm data. This accelerates the content development process while ensuring consistency and accuracy across submissions.

Agentic AI goes further. It applies rules and patterns to automate complex decisioning, such as:

- Bid/no-bid analysis based on historic win rates, client behavior, and proposal complexity;
- Identification of gaps in credentials or compliance criteria;
- Pricing recommendations based on past engagements and sector benchmarks;
- Real-time formatting of output to match specific client templates or procurement systems.

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At GHD, our goal wasn't just to speed up proposals—it was to ensure that every submission used the full depth of our global expertise to reference the most compelling value proposition, no matter where it originated.

By integrating content from across our organisation and embedding it into our AI enabled workflows, we've created a system that empowers teams across the firm to deliver higher quality proposals with consistency and confidence. ”

Sonia Adams

Global Chief Client Officer, GHD

This is not about marginal gains. It's about building a system that continuously learns, improves, and accelerates the firm's ability to compete for work. AI alone isn't the answer—but AI embedded in a well-designed operating model is becoming the new standard.

Sidebar: Rethinking Technology Evaluations in Professional Services

Too many firms still evaluate technology through a 1990s procurement lens: issue an RFP, pick the feature-richest vendor, and spend the next 18 months configuring for every hypothetical scenario. These waterfall-style deployments are slow, costly, and frequently fail—not because the tech is flawed, but because the deployment model is.

GHD succeeded by taking a different approach: starting small, proving value, and scaling based on outcomes—not assumptions. The team began with a tightly scoped pilot, demonstrated ROI early, and treated the initial rollout as a proof of value rather than a full-scale implementation.

This agile, outcome-oriented model is more than just a deployment tactic—it represents a cultural shift. It prioritizes adoption over perfection, speed over scope, and results over risk aversion. For firms serious about modernizing business development, it's the only approach that delivers lasting change.

Lessons Learned and Strategic Implications

The takeaway from GHD's transformation is not simply about technology. It's about orchestration. Winning work at scale requires alignment across people, process, and platform.

- **People:** Leadership buy-in is essential. Across projects, executive teams led the charge—embedding the platform into core processes like onboarding, performance reviews, and appraisals to ensure long-term adoption.
- **Process:** GHD's approach to modular, reusable content shows that standardization does not have to mean rigidity. The firm balanced consistency with regional customization to support both brand integrity and local responsiveness.
- **Technology:** Experience platforms with embedded AI are redefining what it means to compete in business development. Firms still using file shares, spreadsheets, and Word-based templates will increasingly find themselves outpaced—not because they lack capability, but because they lack scalability.